

VZCZCXYZ0001
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAM #3360/01 3580421
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 230421Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4006
INFO RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS AMMAN 003360

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT:RSHORE AND NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PTER ASEC JO
SUBJECT: JORDAN: 2008 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 120019

¶1. (U) In its public statements and security measures, the Government of Jordan continued to place a high priority on its fight against violent extremism in 2008. This occurred against a backdrop of low support among Jordanians for terrorism. The Pew Research Center Global Attitudes survey of 2008 indicated that only 19 percent of Jordanian Muslims expressed confidence in Osama Bin Laden and only 25 percent believed suicide bombing was ever justified - roughly the same as last year, but reflecting a multi-year downward trend.

¶2. (U) According to the same survey, however, Jordan was the only Muslim country in which most respondents had favorable opinions of Hamas, a designated foreign terrorist organization. The demographic realities attendant to hosting a majority Palestinian population - coupled with intensifying concern in Jordan about the stalled peace process and instability in the Palestinian areas were among the factors behind a government decision to resume dialogue with Hamas. News of the meetings first surfaced in July. Jordan in recent years had maintained one of the more antagonistic policies toward Hamas among Arab states.

¶3. (U) The government offered little public comment on its motivations and plans for the General Intelligence Department's (GID) engagement with Hamas - saying talks were narrowly focused on security issues - but local and Arab media outlets portrayed a more holistic improvement of ties, citing the release in October of two Hamas members accused of photographing sensitive Jordanian sites as a direct result and also raising the possibility of an eventual high-level visit by Damascus-based Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Mish'al. According to an August poll by the Jordan Center for Strategic Studies - conducted after the first public reports of the Hamas-Jordan meetings - the percentage of Jordanian respondents who said they viewed Hamas as a "legitimate resistance organization" increased from 59 to 71 percent since June; the pollster attributed the rise in Hamas' popularity in part to the Hamas-Government of Jordan warming trend.

¶4. (U) Even as the Jordan-Hamas relationship thawed somewhat, however, the government continued to express its strong support for the Palestinian Authority, led by Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas, and for the peace process. Noteworthy in this regard was Jordan's ongoing training of over a thousand Palestinian security forces at the Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC) outside of Amman. Throughout 2008, graduates were deployed in the West Bank cities of Jenin and Hebron. These forces contributed significantly to the security of these areas and helped advance peace and stability in the West Bank.

¶5. (U) More broadly, Jordan continued to reinforce the need for moderate authentic Islam worldwide through the propagation of the Amman Message of 2004 and by using the Royal Court-based "Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic

Thought" to coordinate global efforts to promote moderate Islam and interfaith relations. King Abdullah II in 2008 used his position to promulgate this view.

¶6. (U) In a mid-November statement on the third anniversary of the 2005 Amman hotel bombings that killed dozens of Jordanians, King Abdullah reiterated the need to fight terrorism and takfirism (when Muslims assert that other Muslims are not true followers of Islam, and in some cases deserving of death), and to deliver an Islamic message based on moderation and rejection of extremism. Also in November, Jordan hosted a conference entitled "Toward an Islamic Renaissance Plan." Participants called on the Arab media to "open the media, cultural, and political doors for the trends of centrism and moderation... to enable this trend to reach the large masses, which are grabbed by the trends of religious and non-religious extremism and fanaticism."

¶7. (U) Putting such directives into practice, Jordan's Public Security Directorate (PSD) in November 2008 inaugurated a program to expose takfiri prisoners to a select group of jurists and professors of Islamic law and help convince them through dialogue to revise their extremist thinking and limit the danger that those prisoners would impart their thought on other inmates. More generally, Jordan's various security services sought to identify potential radicals before they become violent and to turn them toward a more moderate path early on.

¶8. (U) Jordan's security forces remained vigilant against terror threats and the State Security Court (SSC) - a special tribunal for terrorism and other cases that has both civilian and military judges and attorneys - maintained a heavy caseload, bringing many to trial and convicting others. Some examples:

- In August, the SSC sentenced 15 men to prison for plotting to recruit people to fight Americans in Iraq, also convicting the defendants of plotting actions that would have undermined Jordan's relations with another country and subjected the Kingdom to hostile acts.

- In June, the Court sentenced three men after they were convicted on charges of storing weapons in Jordan for Hamas. The court sentenced Ayman Naji Hamadallah to 15 years in jail with hard labor and handed down five-year jail terms against Muhammad Ahmad Abu-Rabi and Ahmad Abu-Dhyab. The defendants were convicted on the charge of "conspiring to commit acts of terrorism."

- Also in June, the SSC sentenced an Al-Qa'ida network affiliate - Awni Mansi - to life imprisonment with hard labor on charges of possessing automatic weapons with illicit intent and attempted murder during a shoot-out with police in Irbid in January 2007. According to the indictment, Mansi had been assigned by an Al-Qa'ida member in Syria to recruit Jordanian men to be trained in Syria and Lebanon before being sent to Iraq to join Al-Qa'ida members.

- In May, the SSC sentenced Sattam Zawahra, 29, Nidal Momani, 30, and Tharwat Daraz, 25, to 15-year prison terms after convicting them of plotting to assassinate President George W. Bush during his visit to Jordan in November 2006. The tribunal first handed the defendants the death penalty but immediately commuted the sentence to 15 years because they were "still young and deserve a second chance in life."

¶9. (U) It should also be noted that in May, Jordan's Supreme Court overturned the 10-year sentence of Muammar Ahmad Yusuf Al-Jaghbir, who had been convicted for his role in the 2002 murder of USAID official Laurence Foley in Amman. The Court referred the case back to the SSC.

¶10. (U) While the security forces and the SSC responded effectively to terrorism, some legislative tools proved impotent. For instance, UN Conventions that were signed by the government and believed to be recognized by the UN Assembly (for example, the UN Convention Against Hostage

Taking, Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism) are not recognized by the Ministry of Justice as able to withstand judicial scrutiny because they were never enacted by Parliament and/or published in the Gazette. Therefore, they are not recognized as legitimate and are unenforceable.

¶11. (U) The Jordan Securities Commission Board of Commissioners issued anti-money laundering (AML) regulations for securities activities in June, a positive step toward defining obligated entities falling under the regulatory purview of the Commission; establishing requirements for creating effective internal anti-money laundering (AML); establishing record keeping requirements; and requiring specific due diligence procedures for dealing with high risk customers including politically exposed persons. The lack of comprehensive legislation addressing terrorist financing, however, remains a gap in Jordanian efforts to impede money laundering and terrorist financing (CFT). During 2008, over 400 Jordanians - in banks, the insurance commission, Jordan Customs, the PSD, the GID, as well as judges and prosecutors - received training on the full range of AML/CFT issues.

¶12. (U) In mid-December, the United States and Jordan signed an agreement to work cooperatively to detect, deter, and interdict illicit smuggling of nuclear material - deepening the Jordanian-U.S. partnership in the global effort to prevent nuclear terrorism and proliferation. The agreement will help Jordan expand its detection systems at various ports of entry and lead to training of Jordanian officials on the use and maintenance of the equipment.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman>

Beecroft